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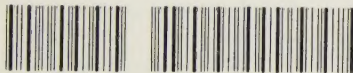
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ANNALS OF A  
LANCASHIRE VILLAGE

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# ANNALS OF A LANCASHIRE VILLAGE

BY  
CLARE DORNING

"The short and simple annals of the poor"—

GRAY'S ELEGY

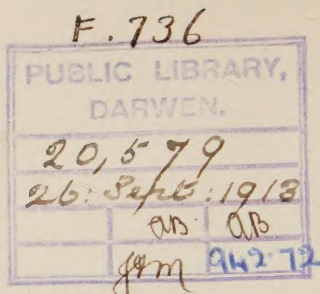


LONDON

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16 Bouverie Street, Fleet Street, E.C.

1913



## DEDICATION

To the memory of my dear mother; to J. L. (Yorkshire), and J. H. S. (my kinsman, Sydney, Australia), schoolmasters and true gentlemen both,—whose kindly sympathy and appreciation have meant so much to me,—this little effort of my pen is affectionately and gratefully dedicated.

CLARE DORNING.

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# Annals of a Lancashire Village

## PROLOGUE

OURS was a quaint, queer-looking, straggling village, with little or nothing to appeal to the fancy of strangers, who often facetiously observed that it was the last place God made, and He was tired when He made it! Yet to natives, it was "to memory ever dear," as shown by the frequent visits of those who had been forced by circumstances to leave it, and take up their residence elsewhere, though even they would not go so far as to describe it as "Heaven's reflex."

Whatever faults it had, it was not a stuffy place, as, look which way you would,

you would find open spaces, "free to the winds of Heaven," and always breezy and fresh in spite of the dust from the surrounding collieries—the broad, well-kept main road stretching as far as one could see, thus showing that there was some connection with the outside world. In winter sometimes, when the snow lay thick on the ground, one would be surprised at the wonderful transformation. As long as the whiteness and purity lasted, the village would be a dream of beauty, though, alas! owing to environment, this dream never lasted long, but its very brevity made us appreciate it all the more.

The cottage gardens were trim and neat, and the majority of the cottagers made the most of the little plots, which in



summer were bright with beds of old-fashioned flowers; while here and there was reserved a patch for herbs or vegetables, as the taste of the owner suggested. How peaceful it was when daily duty was over, and the evening rest or recreation set in! Some would be busy gardening, and those who were not blessed with plots of their own, would come and loll over the fence, watching and criticising the gardener, who was never too preoccupied to stop occasionally, and have a little chat; or, when some event had stirred the little community, leave the gardening altogether, and content himself with "watching the flowers grow," while giving his opinion on the matter in hand in no uncertain fashion.

"Dun yo' remember Jim Jones? Eh,

woren't he a mon for fleawrs? wi' t' best garden an' t' fahnest roses for mahles reawnd!"

"Aye, Ah do that! He wor a mon for gardens, an' Harry Kay wor another. It would tak' somebody cliver to 'byed' (beat, surpass) thoose two!"

Humdrum, no doubt, it was, but, ah me! how many would go back to the humdrum life if they could, after fighting life's battles in some bigger, noisier, dirtier, and maybe wealthier place! The very monotony would be restful, would still "life's fitful fever" to some extent; and the reminiscences of bygone days would have a pleasant and soothing effect on the unruly or weary spirit. Youth looks eagerly forward to the future, and fills it hopefully with the brightest of prospects,

while age finds its greatest happiness in retrospect, dwelling lovingly on the "good old times " which, in the happening, seemed so very ordinary and commonplace !



PART I  
QUAINT CHARACTERS





## CHAPTER I

### "JERRY WALKER"

A WELL-KNOWN figure was that of the village butcher. He was not of the powerful build that one somehow expects in a butcher, though his weight in avoirdupois was not to be despised. I see him now, in my mind's eye—a short, brisk, rotund figure, with a round, full, clean-shaven face, trotting cheerily along ; laden with a basket, heavy or otherwise, as he was going to, or returning from, his delivery rounds. Brisk though he was, he was never in a great hurry, and though taciturn at times, was always ready to

return a civil greeting when the pedestrians hailed him with the usual "How do, Jerry?"

A more inoffensive and hard-working man one could not find anywhere when "sober and in his right mind," but let Jerry be "in his cups," and a different man he was altogether, talkative and rough in speech, though never pugilistic, unless at home, where sometimes he would have a frantic outburst. It was well that he had a strong woman for his wife, who really was the master of the house. She had a splendid physique, with physiognomy indicating power in every line and turn, masculine, rather than feminine, in "tout ensemble." Her house was a picture of cleanliness, the woodwork and tables white as snow, the pictures quaint and old-

fashioned, and her china cupboard would have delighted the heart of a connoisseur.

She was strong in mind as well as body, and yet, what a lovable creature Isabel was—true to the core, sincere and downright in act and speech, and the staunchest of friends to those who could claim her friendship. But let someone rouse her ire, and Isabel could give some sharp knocks, and use her "woman's weapon" to such effect that the offender was glad to get out of sight and hearing, and took care not to offend in the same way again.

A careful housewife and clever was Isabel, and a good thing for Jerry it was, else everything would have gone to the wall through his incompetence when "half-seas over." Isabel would have to tackle everything regarding the business in hand,

and get him off to bed as well as she could. Penitence, deep and sincere, would be expressed in the morning ; but, though Jerry's spirit was willing, the flesh was weak, and the poor man was drunk and penitent in turns, to the end of his active life.

Isabel was surprised one evening to receive a visit from the village policeman. He came in, accompanied by Jerry and a few of his cronies. What to make of it all she did not know, but the constable looked alert, while amusement, quiet but deep, was visible on the faces of the rest. Jerry walked to the chest of drawers, and took therefrom two china dogs, Isabel's pet ornaments, which he put on the table in front of the constable with a grin, saying, "Neaw, theere they are !" At this, there was a general roar of laughter at the

expense of the policeman, who eventually joined in himself. It seems that someone had told him Jerry kept two dogs without a license, and on being taxed, Jerry admitted he did, with the result as stated. It provided fun for many a day.

One time Isabel's patience had been exhausted, bout succeeding bout till she was at her wits' end. It was wintry weather, and Jerry came home helplessly drunk, and inclined to be rough. The snow lay deep on the ground, and it was intensely cold, but this did not deter Isabel from following a plan she had decided on after much cogitation. She fastened Jerry to a post in the yard, and invited some small boys to come and have a game of snowball at Jerry's expense, setting the example with right good-will, and no half measures

herself. The boys, of course, were only too glad to join in the game, which was continued for some time, till Isabel thought that Jerry had had enough for one salutary lesson. Then she untied him, got him off to bed, and made him as snug as she could under the circumstances.

Jerry did not need such a punishment again, and Isabel always said it was the most effective plan she had ever alighted on, though in the morning he remembered very little of it. His good-humoured face, and round, fat figure in snow-white apron were seen on the rounds for long after that.

Then the news went round that Jerry was ailing, and unfit to turn out. The familiar figure was missed, and the simple, kindly folks greeted each other with, "Dun



yo' know heaw Jerry is this mornin'?" when meeting in the street. Isabel nursed him in his illness with as much tenderness and solicitude as if he had been the most perfect of husbands, but very soon he was "gathered to his fathers," and laid to rest in the old churchyard.

## CHAPTER II

### “ ISABEL ”

ISABEL missed Jerry very much at first, but she was never a demonstrative woman, and settled down to her lonely life, keeping on a general business when the butcher's goodwill was disposed of, and attending to her property as long as she could. Her spirit was always brave, but for some time before her death, she kept to the house for the most part, only going out to visit one special friend on an occasional evening.

This friend had a daughter, who was a great favourite with Isabel, and rarely went past the house without calling to see how

Isabel fared, and render some service, which, though slight in itself, made Isabel say, "God bless you, Mary."

Often and often she ran in at dusk, to find Isabel sitting in her chair in the gloaming, or perhaps with a candle burning on the table.

"Why, Isabel," would be the cry, "what are you sitting in the dark for?"

"Oh, Ah was waitin' for yo'. Ah thowt yo'd fotch me a lamp-glass. Ah've just bin an' brokken mahne."

The girl would go off with a laugh and an "Au revoir, Isabel," very soon returning with the glass, when she would trim the lamp, and light it, leaving Isabel after a little chat, cosy as could be for the rest of the evening, quite happy and content with her book or work.

The very next time Mary called, perhaps the very next evening, the same round would be gone through, Isabel berating herself for a "greight clumsy bluffin," and another glass would be fetched. It got so common an occurrence, that often Mary said to her mother when turning out on an errand, "Don't expect me back too soon, mother dear, as I'm calling at Isabel's, and she will very likely want me to fetch her a lamp-glass."

Her mother would laugh, and say, "Oh, do all you can for Isabel. She is such a good creature, and likes to have you with her."

One evening for a wonder, the lamp-glass was intact, so there was time for a little chat.

"Well, Isabel, what business to-day?"

"Oh, not so mich; mit as weel shut t'shop up. Ah've bin up three tahmes fro' my cheer for lads who wanted two ha'pennies for a penny."

"Is that all?"

"Oh, now; a wench coome in for a pennorth o' cheese beawt (without) crust; an' a woman coome for summat, an' hoo said it wor a ha'penny cheaper i' teawn (town), so Ah towld her t' go theere for it!"

"Well, Isabel, you certainly won't make a fortune at that rate. Shall I read a bit for you?"

Another time Mary had some photographs to show to Isabel, which Mrs. Johnson wanted her to see. Commenting on one of the photos, Isabel said, "That woman looks seawr (sour). Her face looks

as if hoo'd just wäsht flooer, an' somebody had trodden on it afore it were dry!"

As Mary ran off one evening, with her usual, "Au revoir, Isabel," she heard in reply, "Olive oil, Mary." Later on, she omitted the phrase on one occasion, and was puzzled rather to hear Isabel say, "Castor oil, Mary," as she ran off. Evidently, Isabel had got "mixed" in her French, but the association of ideas led her easily from "olive oil" to "castor oil," and the solution of the puzzle came like a flash to Mary as she flew along for the lamp-glass. Some of the folks in the lane saw her, and said, "Theere's Mary Johnson, an' hoo does look happy. What's hoo up to neaw, Ah wonder?"

"Oh, fotchin' summat for Isabel, Ah'll bet. Hoo'll be back soon, yo'll see."



One night, the mother went round, and came home with a very sad face. "Isabel is ill, dear, and I am afraid it is very serious." Mary wrote to her people, who came to look after her, but soon the weary, work-worn body gave up the struggle, and Isabel was laid to rest beside the husband with whom she had laboured and struggled so long. "So He giveth His beloved sleep!"

In one chimney corner, where a mother and daughter sat, Isabel's homely face and quaint conversation were much missed; and there seemed a niche empty and void in both their lives, till the mother herself was called to join her friend, and her own "treasures in Heaven," and the very "wheels of life" seemed to stand still for Mary!

When it became known that Mary's mother was at rest, many hearts were stirred, and Mary was greeted in every direction. "Oh, Mary, we're so sorry abeawt yore loss. We know wod yo' an' yore mother were to each other. Eawr Maggie's bin cryin' aw neet for yo'." And Mary would return the pressure of the work-worn hand, and turn away with brimming eyes and a full heart, to be greeted again a few yards further with, "Oh, Mary, Ah'm so sorry for yo'. God bless yo' an' keep yo'. Wa'st aw miss yore mother, hoo wor so good to everybody," or "Ah connot speyk lahke yo', Mary, but Ah con pray, an' Ah con feel for yo', yo' know that!"

Whatever the faults of our homely, Lancashire folks, blunt and rough as they

sometimes are, their worst enemies cannot say they are lacking in sympathy and kindly feeling.

## CHAPTER III

### "ABNER ROWE"

ANOTHER familiar figure was that of Abner Rowe. He was a well-set-up man, of medium height, strongly built, with a grave-looking, but kindly face. Abner could be very stern at times, as those under him knew well, and his words cut like a knife occasionally, when he spoke to the point. A splendid man for business he was, though what education he had was self-acquired, and had been worked up in his evening hours. His handwriting was beautiful, and quite characteristic. Many a chat he had with Mary, who was a

favourite with him, as well as with Isabel, and she gained some insight of his early life and struggles.

He had been a veritable "John Bull," with all his pertinacity, and the "hold-fast" tendencies of John Bull's dog, so had managed to make a good bit of money, which he invested in property when he saw a good opportunity. As landlord for Mary's mother, he came and went as he pleased, and a very welcome visitor he always proved to the two of them. Talking one day about the frugal living that they had to be content with when they were young, Abner was asked for his bill of fare.

"Oh," says he, "that's easily tow'd. Mi landlady used to say, 'Wor are yo' gooin' t' have for yore breakfast, Abner?' 'Thick

(oatmeal) porritch an' buttermilk,' Ah said. 'An' wod for yore dinner?' 'Thick porritch an' buttermilk!' Ah'd thick porritch an' buttermilk mooast o' t' tahme, but o' Sundays, Ah geet thick porritch an' sweet milk for a change. Neaw, Mary, lookin' at me, dun yo' think it wor a bad diet?"

"No, Abner, it couldn't be a bad diet, when there is such a splendid specimen of humanity as you are for the result."

"Ah don't live on that neaw, yo' know. Ah have what's good an' nourishin'; but Ah don't care for the lot o' new-fangled, fancy stuff there is neaw-a-days. Gie me summat plain, an' substantial, an' Ah'm satisfied."

One day he popped in when Mary had just set a dainty tea-table for her mother

and herself, the crowning point of which was a beautifully-coloured mould of jelly. After going over the business matter he had called to speak about, his eyes wandered to the table.

"Eh, my! Mary, whatever's that theere ditherin' stuff yo'n gotten on t' table? Ah've seen it afore somewheere, but Ah dunnot know what it is!"

"Oh, that is jelly, Abner, and very nice. Will you stay and have tea with mother and me, and then you can taste it?"

"Oh, now; thank yo' aw t' same, Mary, but Ah mun go whoam, wheere mi own tay will be waitin'."

"Well, but you shall have a taste before you go," and Mary rushed off to the pantry for a plate and spoon, helping Abner to a portion of the jelly. He tasted it rather

gingerly at first, but finished it off with more and more enjoyment.

“My word, Mary, but that’s good. Ah’s’t tell mi missus to get some, neaw Ah know what it is.”

Many times when things about the house wanted repairing, the mother would say, “This matter wants attending to, or that, but we won’t tackle Abner till Mary happens to be at home, and then she can manage it for us.” His property was somewhat of an anxiety, and made many calls on Abner’s purse, so he was dubbed rather stingy at times, but Mary never found him so, as generally she had only to mention the necessary repairs to get them done ; this often after many broad hints from others. Mary, however, was much like Abner himself in her directness



of speech, and “hit straight from the shoulder,” saying directly what was required.

A new bath had been put in the bathroom, and Abner decided that it should be enamelled after all other things were finished off. To Mrs. Johnson he said, “Ah’st buy summat, ‘emmanuel’ they caw it, for that bath, an’ yore Frank con put it on ; so dunnot use it till it’s finished off.”

He came in some time later, bearing a big tin of enamel. “Neaw, Mrs. Johnson, Ah’ve browt yo’ that stuff for t’ bath. Tell yore Frank he con get it done.”

Frank came home just before Abner went out, and on getting to the door, he turned round to say, “Neaw, Frank, don’t forget to ‘emmanuel’ that bath. Thi

mother's gotten t' emmanuel, an' tha mun put three cooats on, but tha mun wait for one dryin' afore tha puts another on, mahnd."

Frank laughed, and said, "Oh, yes, Abner, I'll emmanuel the bath."

## CHAPTER IV

“ABNER ROWE” (*continued*)

AT that time Mary was a teacher at a school many miles away, coming home only for week-ends. One day at school, a scholar came to her with, “Please, Miss Johnson, you are wanted at the door.”

So Mary went to see who wanted her, and found Abner there. It was like a breath of “home” to her, to see his kindly face, so she welcomed him with outstretched hands. “Oh, Abner, what a treat to see you! Have you come from mother? Is anything wrong?”

“Now, but Ah happened t’ have a bit

o' business abeawt here, an' Ah thowt Ah'd caw an' see yo'."

"Come in, then, and I'll show you round the school, and introduce you to the master."

"Oh, but Ah dunnot wänt a fuss, though Ah should lahke t' see t' schoo'."

He was taken in, and straight to the master, who, though very homely himself, was a bit puzzled by Abner's blunt speech. After the introduction, he says, "Yo' see, Ah've known Miss Johnson aw her life, an' Ah think hoo's t' best wench i' aw t' village. Ah thowt Ah'd just caw an' see her. Hoo's takkin' me wi' her to her lodgin's for a drink o' wayter."

"Nay, Abner, she's not," chimed in Mary, "you are coming with me for a good cup of tea, and perhaps a bit of

jelly as well. No 'cups o' wayter' for old friends." And the schoolmaster looked more and more puzzled, though Abner's demeanour, apart from his speech, was as gentlemanly as his own.

He was delighted by being shown round the whole school, and was introduced to most of the teachers, whom he amused by his quaint observations on what he saw.

School over, Mary and he set off very happily towards her lodgings, where the landlady got a surprise, which she seemed to enjoy thoroughly. After a nice tea and a cosy chat, Abner says, "Neaw, Mary, Ah mun see abeawt t' train, an' make tracks for whoam. Yo'll tell me t' road to t' station, an' Ah'st caw an' see yore mother, an' tell her what a grand tahme Ah've had wi' yo'."

“I’ll see about your train, Abner, but there is no hurry, and I’m coming to the station with you, so you will be all right.”

Going to the station, Abner says, “Well, Mary, yo’n treated me reet weel, an’ Ah’ve enjoyed mysel’ a lot. Yo’ know, if Ah’m not so very smart, Ah’ve aw t’ comfort Ah ever need—a good bed, a comfortable whoam o’ my own, an’ plenty o’ good food. If Ah thowt t’ queen had a better, an’ moore comfortable bed than mahne, Ah’d have one lahke it. Ah’ve often thowt Ah’d lahke t’ gooa to London, an’ have a good look reawnd, but Ah think Ah’m gettin’ too owd for that neaw, though Ah could afford it aw reet.”

Mary laughed, and said, “Well, Abner, you have a lot to be thankful for if you never get to London.”

"Happen if Ah went, it would be summat lahke it wor wi' t' mon fro' Wiggin."

"Why, what is that, Abner?"

"Oh, yo' see, a mon fro' Wiggin went to London for t' fust tahme. He worn't such a very sharp fellow, so his friends tow'd him he'd ha' to mahnd, or else he'd get his pocket picked theere. He kept sayin', 'Ne'er mahnd me, Ah'st be aw reet.' Gooin' reawnd London, somebery put a hond in his pocket, but the Wiggin mon kept gooin' on, never lettin' on as he know'd. Somebery says to him, 'Don't you see a man has his hand in your pocket, my man?' 'Oh, has he?' he says, 'well ler him ger it eawt, then.' He had filled aw his pockets wi' fish-hooks afore startin', an' had hooked a quare

fish!" And the two had a good laugh about the sharpness of the "Wiggin mon."

Mary's mother told her what a delighted old man Abner was when he called to give her an account of his visit, and what pleasant things he said of Mary and her welcome. "Oh, aye, Ah'd back Mary agen aw yore lasses," he said.

Some time after that, Abner's step became slower, his face paler, though to all intents and purposes, he was the same hale, hearty old man as of yore. Some insidious disease had laid hold of him, and he suspected this for a long time before saying anything to his wife, or consulting a doctor. Eventually, he took to his bed, and whenever Mary was at home, he liked her to go to see him. One weekend, her mother said, "You must not fail



to visit Abner this time, Mary. He has been asking for you, and I believe the end is drawing very near."

Mary was grieved, but managed to show a very brave face while talking to Abner, who seemed quite cheery and bright. When she was saying good-bye, he clasped her hand, and said, "Well, Mary, perhaps Ah'st never see yo' again, but God bless yo' for ever an' ever. Yo'll promise me one thing, winnot yo'?"

"What is that, Abner?"

"Whatever comes, yo'll never forget yon owd lady, yore mother, who has been such a good mother to yo' aw, an' t'others has mcoastly flown, so it'll faw on yo' to look after her."

"Oh, Abner, you have my promise. It would be just the same without it, as she

shall never lack care and attention while I have the strength to look after her."

"Aye, Ah know that yo'll do yore duty, but Ah thowt Ah'd just mention it to yo'." And goodbye was said for the last time, Mary going out of the house blinded with tears.

Next time she went home, her mother said, "Abner is gone, dear. He must have suffered a great deal, but he was brave to the last. Surely it will be a happy release to be free from pain after what he has gone through, but we shall miss his cheery face as we missed Isabel's. One more added to our friends in Heaven, one less to suffer down here!"

Years after, when Mary's lot had called her to many different scenes and climes, and various wanderings over the face of

the earth by land and water, she came again to the old village. Abner's daughter saw her, and greeted her warmly. After some conversation on the varied experiences Mary had gone through, came the cry, "Oh, Mary, Ah wish my father were here now. How he'd enjoy your talk. He'd never be tired o' listenin' to yo'. He did think summat o' Mary. Yo'll come an' see me allus when yo' come to th' owd place. There's allus a welcome for my father's sake, as well as your own and your mother's."

The reference brought back a flood of memories to both, and the two women had a little weep together.

"God knows best, you see," said Mary, "though he takes our loved ones from us. More and more, as I get older,

I realise the truth that 'underneath are the Everlasting Arms,' supporting us so tenderly, even when we, with our limited vision, find things apparently dark and hopeless. And then, when the 'Great Awakening' comes, what clear vision we shall have, and all our 'whys' will be answered, for has He not said, 'What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter'?"

## CHAPTER V

### “LEVI CHAPPELL”

ANYONE going frequently to the old village could not fail to notice a man who was often driving or walking along the roads. He was a diminutive figure, invariably lively and cheery, though his step seemed rather heavy—too heavy for his short, slender build. He had a smile, and a kindly word for everybody, and was well-known throughout the place.

His had been a chequered career. Many a time had he crossed the “herring pond,” but was very reticent as to his doings in America. When he appeared,

folks quietly remarked to each other, "Levi's awwhoam agen!" A quiet, in-offensive man he was, who never did harm to any one, but people said he had not got 'aw his cheers awwhoam', thereby implying that Levi was not quite as he ought to be mentally. However that may be, Levi managed to make money in one way or another, and was never really poor, though his mode of life sometimes was a source of much amusement to the villagers.

He had a horse and cart one time, and did whatever business came in his way; was a butcher and poultry breeder, and a general handy man. The young fellows in the lane where he lived, tackled him one night.

"Eh, Levi, tha's gotten no sahn on thi

cart. Why doesn' tha put thi name on, wi' aw thi trades ? "

" Ah know that," says Levi, " but it'll do, whether it's gotten a sahn on or not. Besides, Ah cannot print one."

" Well, wa'll put one on for thi, if tha lahkes."

" Will yo' ? Well, then, yo' shall, so yo' con start it reight away."

The young men set to work in earnest, and got an immense tin plate, painting on it, in big white letters, everything they could think about that Levi ever did, or could possibly think of doing ! A few of the items come to me now :—

" Levi Chappell, farmer, butcher, and chaff dealer ; tar, hen and cock-chicken dealer ; furniture remover ; carter and coal dealer," and so on, till there was quite

a long string of trades. They brought it to Levi in great delight, and how proud he was of his grand sign, when they had fixed it on his cart !

One of the lads said to him, " Ah believe wa've missed one o' t' best things eawt."

" What's that ? " asked Levi.

" Why, wa've forgotten t' put ' Meriky mon' on, but it'll ha' t' do neaw."

Levi kept the sign on for some time, and, of course, everyone who saw it admired it, but after a while it mysteriously disappeared. The young men tried to get out of Levi how he had disposed of it, but Levi knew when to speak and when to be silent, so they never knew what had become of it.

Later, he possessed a horse and trap, and used to have friends to drive with



him. When out on the rounds, some would imbibe too freely in the "beverage that inebriates," Levi among them. There would be a row occasionally among the lot, and the services of the policeman would be required to secure law and order. On these occasions, drunk as he was, Levi invariably fell fast asleep on his driving seat as soon as the row started, and slept heavily till the very end of it, when he woke up as if by magic !

His companions used to tell a tale about a rough trip he had once from America. The weather was very boisterous, and the ship tossed so heavily that Levi thought it surely would go down. His "chum" heard him praying in a sheltered corner, and he said the prayer was to this effect :—

"Oh, God, save Levi, save him this

tahme, though he has bin a bad 'un ; an' when he gets whoam, he'll gie thi a fat pig."

" But, Levi," said his friend, " tha has noane. Heaw will t' do ? "

" Howd thi din, mon," says Levi. " He doesn' know ! "

Once he had a trial as a collier, but this did not last long. His eyes troubled him, and one morning, on rising, he could scarcely open them. He went off to the pit, and went down in the cage to the "boss." " Eh," he says, " Ah've com'n a-tellin' yo' as Ah cawn't come, an' if Ah do come, Ah cawn't see, Ah con see enuff o' that ! " and went back home.

A relative happened to be ill once, and Levi was asked how she was. " Well, hoo's noather a bit bettther, nor a bit wus ;

a little bit bettther, if oather ; but not so mich o' anny !"

Levi started a little farm with two or three cows, after one of his absences, which had been longer than usual. It was in a very lonely spot, "eawt' o' t' world," as some of the villagers said, but Levi said he liked it "aw't bettther for that." He had a pony and trap, which he used in his milk rounds. He sold his milk a little cheaper than any-one else, so got a business that way. One night, he had indulged rather too freely at a public-house, and another man, by means of a bet, or fraud of some kind, won his pony from him, and took it from the stable.

The next morning, Levi, sober enough now, received a shock when he got to the stable and found it empty. Some faint idea of the events of the past night dawned

on his mind. Without hesitation, he fixed his cans in the trap as usual, then placed himself in the shafts, acting as pony and milkman both, on his rounds, till he could manage to buy another horse. Everyone was amused, and said, "Well, what will Levi do next?"

Time passed on, and Levi seemed quite happy in his "eawt o' t' world" home. He had transacted some business one night with a farmer who wanted to settle an account he owed Levi. Levi settled the bill, but returned the pounds to the man, keeping only the odd shillings himself, saying the farmer must keep it for him, as he would need it for something special later. The next morning, he failed to appear on his milk round, and after a time, some one went to see what was the matter. He

found Levi lying dead on his kitchen floor, with a wound on his temple that might have been caused by a fall or a blow. Some held the theory that some person had known that Levi would receive money the previous evening, and had entered his house with the intention of securing it ; but Levi had stood on his defence, and so met his death.

Others thought he had had a fit, and fallen with such force as to cause the fatal injury. No money was found about the place, but Levi was not in the habit of talking about his affairs, only when in drink, so there was no proof that a robbery had been committed beyond the fact that the few odd shillings he had received from the farmer the night before were missing.

The farmer came forward, and told of

his business with Levi, handing over the money he held in trust to a relative, and an investigation was made without any result ; so the mystery of the sad death of poor Levi, who never injured anybody in his life, as far as the villagers could recollect, has never been cleared up—perhaps never will be till the time when “every work is brought into judgment.”

The owner of the house he had lived in, had it razed to the ground, and the “eawt o’ t’ world” spot, desolate before, is far more desolate now, and few of the villagers will go near it.

## PART II

“YOUTHFUL PLEASURES”





## CHAPTER VI

### “CHILDREN’S GAMES AND TRICKS ”

CHILDREN all over the world are much the same, when roughly aggregated. There is the same love of mischief and fun, the same insatiable curiosity, precocity or slowness in different degrees, to be met with in all. Nor were these Lancashire village children behindhand in any of these qualities. They always seemed able to derive fun and amusement from somewhere, quiet though the place was.

When not at school, there were the lanes and fields, where games of all kinds were invented and played ; flowers were picked,

and garlands were made ; and “ boats ” were sailed on the streams and ponds. Fishing was indulged in, and it made very little impression on the mischiefs if one or other happened to throw himself or herself into the water with the rod ! What matter, when they so easily scrambled, or were dragged, out ? Occasionally, serious accidents did occur, and fishing for the time being would be “ out of fashion,” and the children’s faces graver ; but the “ joie de vivre ” asserted itself again after a space, and youth was as buoyant as ever !

Games were much indulged in during the long summer evenings—“ jacks,” marbles, battledore and shuttlecock, and skipping-rope, making way for each other, according to the season. There is an “unwritten law” even with regard to children’s games, and

one succeeded another without anyone knowing the reason for the change. Such games as "duck-stone;" "oranges and lemons;" "kidnapper" (in which there is a quaint dialogue between the busy mother and her quondam children, commencing, "Mother, mother, t' pon's boilin' o'er!"); "ball" (against a wall when elders were lenient, or as "rounders,") could be played at all seasons, to suit the fancy of the players; but the ball games were mostly in vogue after the summer holiday, when many of them had been taken to Blackpool, or Southport, where the balls were bought. No more welcome gift could be thought of by a kindly neighbour, or relative, who took pity on some child not fortunate enough to pay a visit to the seaside.

Many a time when the children had just

got deep into a nice game of ball, an old woman would come out of her house, and berate them soundly. How she hated them, and they fully reciprocated the feeling, making some sly return for her "checks" in what way they could, whenever opportunity presented itself.

One evening, after dark, the boys concocted a plan to pay out old Ann for stopping a game. They got an old mop, and placed it against her door, so that when Ann came out, it would fall into her arms. Then one of the lads fixed a button hanging by a string to "tiddley-bump" (knock, in swinging,) on old Ann's window. They all got into hiding, and when a gust of wind came, the button set to work in earnest, bringing out old Ann in a great flutter. In the dark, she mistook the mop

for a boy's head, and how she pulled his locks, saying as she did so, "Ah'll give it thee, comin' here wi' thi tricks. Ah'll poo thi hair for thi, neaw Ah've catcht thi!" till the trick dawned on her, and she retreated into the house, the boys nearly choking with laughter all the while in their hiding-place.

One evening they had been playing near old Ann's house, not in any mischief though, when some one said, "Owd Ann's comin'," and in a panic they all sought refuge in one of her own outhouses. They kept quiet as mice for a long time, till it began to get dark, when they tried to get out, only to find that the door had a spring catch, and they were locked in. The awful yell that was set up simultaneously with the discovery of imprison-

ment, brought old Ann on to them immediately. "Thoose childer again, allus i' mischief. Ah wonder wod they'n bin up to neaw!" they heard, as she came to unfasten the door; and as each one hurried out, her blows fell fast, and with no gentle force. "Thoose childer" kept away from old Ann for a long time after that.

Another trick the boys were very fond of playing, was that of the brick in a paper bag. It used to be put right in the middle of the pathway most frequented, and was fixed so as to resemble an empty bag. Of course, any one seeing it lying there so innocently, was seized with an irresistible desire to kick it out of the way; to receive a shock, big or little, dependent on the tenderness or otherwise of the foot, when,

instead of meeting the soft, yielding paper, it came into contact with the hard, resisting brick. Sometimes a man with corns would follow the prevailing impulse, and his language would be untranslatable, his rage unbounded, when he caught sight of the "urchins" in ambush.

There was one big girl who was the leader of mischief, or fun, for the lot, named Elizabeth Ann. (One name was never used without the other.) She it was who set them to daring tricks, perhaps to be played on one or other of the neighbours ; or to take the form of some deed of prowess on their own parts, maybe to climb a tree, or jump from a great height, or leap over a wider and wider part of a brook. What did it matter if some of them jumped into the water instead of

landing on the other side? They got dry pretty quickly in running about. If they went home—well, it meant punishment, and they preferred to dry themselves outside.

One day the boys found a lizard on the moorland, and called it an asker. The girls preferred to have Mary Johnson's opinion as to what it was, so fetched her. As soon as she saw it, she promptly named it a "little crocodile," and a little crocodile it always was for the children after that.

Elizabeth Ann invented a ghost game one evening. A sheet was borrowed from somewhere (surreptitiously, of course,) and a big stick used to make the "ghost" look taller. The children were all to run as if in terror, and set up a yell, as the ghost



was making its way down an entry. The woman for whose benefit the trick was played, came running out of her house just in the nick of time to see the figure disappearing round a corner. She comforted the frightened (?) children as well as she could, and fetching out some more neighbours, gave them quite a long tirade. "Men were gettin' so very bowd neaw, that it was not safe for t' childer to play even close to whoam," while they listened quietly, and then sneaked off to join the ghost.

## CHAPTER VII

### “QUIETER MOMENTS—SCHOOL”

SOMETIMES at twilight, a quiet fit would come over us all, and we would beg Elizabeth Ann to tell us some of her stories, of which she seemed to possess an inexhaustible supply. How we gloried in her weird tales of “Red Indians,” and what blood-curdling descriptions she gave us of life on the prairie! Some of us would be so terrified that we were often afraid to separate from the company. And how she revelled in describing the wonderful powers for evil comets had, till she had us peering fearfully up into the

sky, dreading to find one there, ready to knock against something with its long tail, and bring dire disaster to us all like a crack of doom!

And yet we never got weary of these tales, while sitting in a circle on the moorland with Elizabeth Ann in the midst of us, talking as if life itself depended on finishing her story. We got to know them so well, that eventually she had to be exceedingly wary in the telling, as the least deviation or slip was noticed and remarked on by one or other of us.

Quarrels there were among us at times, and even "stand-up fights" on occasion. A big lad had been very cruel to one little girl one evening, so the girls banded together, and gave Tommy such a

“trouncing” as he was not likely to forget in a hurry. There was quite a hubbub afterwards, as tongues wagged “fast and furious,” when a voice broke in, “What’s up wi’ yo’ childer to-neet?” and looking up, they saw a comely young woman smiling at them. She was taken into confidence at once, as they all knew Ellen, and asked for her opinion as to the rights of the case. Her verdict was, “Well, if they hitten yo’, yo’ mun hit um back, an’ stond up for yersels.” Her advice was always followed, and in any dispute Ellen was called on to arbitrate when she appeared on some errand in the village.

In school there was sometimes a lot of fun going on, whenever there was an opportunity. The school-master was a very quiet, stern-faced man, and it seemed

a most difficult thing to get a smile from him at times. He was a "great man" at prayer-meetings too, and one of the girls named Elsie, suggested one day that a prayer-meeting should be held, if a favourable opportunity presented itself next needlework lesson, when the master was with the boys in another room.

The mistress used to perch herself on a desk, with her back to the bigger girls, while the girls requiring work fixing or examining, stood in a semi-circle round her. Many a silent prayer-meeting was held in the sheltered corner, Elsie always being the leader (representing "owd Tom," as she irreverently termed the master, though he was not an old man by any means). The silence of the game was its safeguard, and the mistress was quite un-

suspicious that anything out of the ordinary was toward.

Elsie would give the signal, and down would drop all the class with one exception, peeping slyly from closed (?) eyes at Elsie, whose face with its contortions and grimaces was a perfect treat, while her hands went up and down, and out and in, in a very frenzy! At a word from the "sentinel," they would slip back to their places, and the mistress, looking round, would see all quite absorbed in work, and as good as gold.

One of the girls was remarkably slow, and the sharper ones were good-natured enough to assist her over her difficulties many a time and oft. Alice showed her appreciation of the kindness by bringing nice cakes—her mother made some

delicious sweetmeats—to eat whenever there was a chance—during school hours preferably, as they tasted best then. Stolen delights are proverbially the sweetest!

One morning, during "roll-call," Elsie was busy munching one of Alice's biggest cakes, when the master looked up and said, "What have you got there, Morton?" He had a reprehensible habit of calling even girls by their surnames, and they resented it rather, young as they were.

"Please, sir, it is a cake."

"Well, stand up on the seat, and hold it above your head."

Elsie promptly obeyed, while a quiet laugh went round the class, boys and girls alike enjoying the fun.

Elsie got tired at last, and bit by bit the

cake dwindled, till eventually it had all disappeared. Somebody asked in a stage whisper, "Eh, Elsie, wheere's thi cake?"

"Ah've etten it," says Elsie, "Ah were turet o' howdin' it up!"

It was fortunate for her that the master had forgotten all about the cake when he returned, and considered that the standing on the seat had been punishment sufficient for Elsie's misdemeanour.

When any of the girls had anything in the way of a treat, it was customary to let most enjoy it, as far as this could be managed. There was one girl in particular who was rather selfish, and kept things mostly to herself. She had an orange one day, and doled out a tiny portion to her special chum. Elsie badly wanted a bit of orange, but no amount of persuasion



availed to make Annie turn over a taste.

Elsie passed the word slyly round the class, "Hand all your slate-rags over, girls, and you'll see I'll get some orange out of Annie yet." They were immediately forthcoming, though the girls could not fathom Elsie's plan, but kept on the watch. All the rags were stuffed into Elsie's pocket, and then her hand went in.

Turning over her frock, and displaying the big, solid "round" at the bottom of her pocket, she twisted in her seat, and whispered, "Annie, tha wouldn' gie me anny o' tha orange. Ah'll gie thee noane o' mahne."

Instantly, quite a generous portion was handed to her, Annie saying, "Here, Elsie, take this." Elsie snatched at it, ate it up, and as soon as the last shred

of Annie's orange had disappeared, she twisted again in her seat, took out all the rags composing the "round," and flung them on Annie's desk, saying, "Here, Annie, Ah'll gie thi aw my orange!" And Annie's "Oh, Elsie Morton!" was a sentence, nay, a chapter, in itself!

## PART III

“SUNDAY SCHOOL REMINISCENCES”



## CHAPTER VIII

### “OLD WILL, AND OTHERS”

No annals of Lancashire village life would be complete without some reference to the religious aspect. The deep religious fervour that has been prevalent for ages, is one of the main characteristics of the majority of Lancashire village folks to-day. May it long continue !

There were several churches in the neighbourhood, but the “Methody” chapel was the most central place of worship. (The sweet, old name lingers in the villages yet, I am glad to say, though in towns it is being superseded by the

more elegant "church.") It was a plain, brick building, standing "four-square to Heaven," which could boast of no architectural beauty whatever outside, and the interior was very plain, though substantial.

Plain as it was, much good had been wrought in the little chapel. It had been the scene of many glorious meetings, of many a brave endeavour to do good to Christ's "little ones," and big ones too; here, many a lad had been converted, and made strong to "fight the good fight," and many a lassie had seeds sown in her character that bore fruit in manifold ways in years to come. Backslidings there were sometimes, but the recollection of the old chapel and school is one that will never be impotent in its leadings towards what is right and good. How many lads have been

kept "honourable and upright," and made strong in time of temptation ; how many frail lassies have been ennobled, by the remembrance of lessons received in the plain, old village chapel, will be known to God alone.

It was a very important building from the villagers' point of view, with its Sunday and week-day services, its class-meetings and prayer-meetings, and missionary gatherings, and other efforts to aid the spiritual side of human nature. The singing was so hearty that some of the preachers said they never heard anything to equal it in any other chapel in the circuit.

There were some quaint figures among its members, each with ways peculiarly his own. One was a little "mixed" very often, while speaking or praying, and the

lively young members of the congregation were always ready for any slip old Will might make. Once he said, "When we see the sound of distant thunder," in the course of an address ; and in generalising, once referred to "more than three-thirds of the people !"

A young local preacher (not a villager) had been taking the service one Sunday evening, and he had preached eloquently and with great earnestness ; so one may imagine his feelings, when Will in his prayer during the after-meeting asked God to "bless the brother who had so feebly spoken that night !"

Will was superintendent of the Sunday school sometimes, and very "long-winded" when speaking at the close of the afternoon session ; so much so, that the boys used to



whisper among themselves, "Owd Will's gotten wound up to-day. Wonder when he'll stop!" He generally closed his prayer with, "And unto Thee we will give all the praise, Amen," after asking blessing and grace for the children, teachers, and officers. One Sunday afternoon, he was a particularly long time over his prayer, and the teacher of the infants' class heard one little chap murmur, "And unto Dee we will gib all de pyaise, Amen!" hurriedly, yet quite plainly, as if wishing to finish up for Will. It was with great difficulty she maintained her composure.

Will was taking a class of rather big boys one Sunday afternoon, and he said, "Neaw, lads, wa'll not read this afternoon, but i'stid, yo' shall ax' me anny questions yo' lahke, an' Ah'll answer to t' best o' my

ability." This just pleased the boys, and the spokesman for them all said, "Who was the father of Zebedee's children, Will?" Will looked puzzled, and shuffled a bit, under the eager scrutiny of several pairs of mischievous eyes ; but at last he said, "Nay, lads, dunnot ax me questions as nobery could answer. Let's read eawr usual chapter !" And an inaudible chuckle went round the class, to have its outlet in a loud guffaw as soon as they were "beyond the portals" after school. In spite of his little ways, a well-meaning man and kindly, was Will.

Another teacher who was very popular with the boys was given the most unruly class in school, and managed them very well. One Sunday, he was called away from the class to attend to some matter of importance.

On rising, he said to the boys, "Neaw, lads, Ah'st ha't' leeuv yo' for a bit. Ah know yo' cannot be so very quiet, but just to pleeas me, be as quiet as yo' con, while Ah'm away." The boys, feeling that they had been put on their honour, were really very quiet for once in their lives.

Some of the older members had a tale of the "long ago" to this effect:—A young fellow was set down to preach his trial sermon on a certain date, meaning to go on the plan as a local preacher. He spent a very long time in the preparation of the great sermon, choosing for his text, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean ; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Psalm li. 7), and attaining what he thought a very creditable result. The great day came, and the

service went very well, right up to the sermon. He gave out the reference for his text, and proceeded to read it out, "Purge me with hyssop," when a spasm of nervousness seized him, and he came to an abrupt stop.

He began again, and again, with the same result, while the congregation waited patiently. Just as he was priming himself for another brave effort, and the tension was strained almost to breaking point, metaphorically speaking, a very old woman in one of the pews said quite audibly, "Eh, tha'd betther t' try some other yerb (herb)!"

We youngsters tried to get the end of the tale, but the "curtain" always fell with a crash at this point, so we gathered that the trial sermon never came off!

One of our chief officers, who had been years and years in connection with the old chapel, was a great favourite. One of the gentlest of men he was, a loving husband and father, and a faithful and true friend to all he knew—a rare case of a man who never got a bad "word" from anyone. ("Word" in the Lancashire sense often implies "character.")

He removed to a place some distance away, and took up service in another Sunday school. One of his old scholars (Mary Johnson's sister, indeed), now grown to womanhood, had been asked to take the service at the little chapel on some special occasion, and give the usual address. She was a splendid speaker, and her well-chosen and clear words were eagerly listened to by all, Samuel among them. At the close

he came forward, and grasping her hand, said, "My dear, I've sat in this chapel for many years, and listened to many sermons, but never heard one that touched me, or pleased me so well as your address to-day. God bless you for your message, and for the sake of the 'auld lang syne' in the dear old village chapel where we spent such happy Sundays."

## CHAPTER IX

### “SUNDRY TALES”

WHEN there were special services or entertainments, a well-to-do old gentleman, who had “risen by his own efforts,” was often called upon to act as chairman, and although most of the folks were called by their Christian names, James Bentley never got anything but “Mester Bentley.” He was not well educated, but able to speak strongly and to the point. A very popular man was Mester Bentley, and a very fine-looking fellow, with snowy hair and bushy beard, surrounding a handsome, if wrinkled face.

He had a great fancy for the hymn, "From Greenland's icy mountains," and we youngsters were always on the "qui vive" for "Ceylon's," which he always pronounced "Keylon's." There would have been some disappointment, I verily believe, had he missed it out, or pronounced it correctly! He had always some good stories to tell us, and this accounted, in part, for his popularity.

Speaking at a tea-meeting one evening, he told of a young fellow assisting a girl with her tea-urn. She was pouring some water in, and said to him, "Neaw, tell me when it's gettin' full." He peered, and peered into the urn, but the light was so defective that he could not see, so he put his finger in to test the height, and got scalded!



To enforce the necessity for thought and truth-speaking at all times, he told us the following story :—A laddie was engaged at some works somewhere—his first venture into the labour market—and one of the "bosses," an eccentric old fellow, thought he would see what stuff the new boy was made of. So he called him to his side one day, and said, "Eh, my lad, con tha see that tree as far as ever tha con see?" pointing in a certain direction. The lad said, "Oh, aye." "Well, con ta see that t'other a bit forr (further)?" And the lad answered, "Aye, Ah con," getting from the old man, "Ger away fro' me. Ah've done wi' thee!"

Several gentlemen were due to speak at a meeting somewhere. As one got up, he said to his neighbour, "Prick my

leg when I've spoken for ten minutes." When the time had expired, the request was complied with, the prick being a very gentle one. No notice was taken of it, so after a time the pin was applied again, with greater force. Still no result. The speaker droned on and on, till at length the man drove the pin as far as he could into the leg, anticipating a yell, as well as a full stop. Disappointment again, so he resigned himself to the inevitable. When the speaker sat down, he said to him, "You've spoken for forty minutes. I pricked you several times." "Oh," he laughed back, "I forgot to tell you. You must have pricked my cork leg!"

We always enjoyed the tales, no matter how often they were repeated,

such a good "raconteur" was Mester Bentley.

One of our preachers, speaking of "the valley of the shadow of death," broke off abruptly, and said, "Now, children, did you ever see a shadow without a light somewhere? Never be afraid of the valley of the shadow of death, because there must be a light to make the shadow, and the Light is Christ Himself, who will take us by the hand, and lead us through the darkness to a safe place in Heaven. And in the darkness of life, when things seem all wrong, remember there is the Light somewhere, and hold fast to your faith in Christ." Words which, like seed planted in good soil, to bear fruit in due season, were remembered by many of us in the years to come, when older and more

careworn, and in greater need of the "abiding comfort" they suggested.

Mary Johnson remembered them well, indeed never let them slip from her thoughts, and strange to say (but true, nevertheless,) many years later she heard some people with rancorous tongues, at a place very far away from the old village, saying something unkind about this very preacher—a preacher still. Someone suggested that Mary had known him when a girl, and might be able to tell them something about the man.

"Yes," said Mary, "I did know him long ago, and respected him, though I never held him faultless." A thrill of anticipation was perceptible throughout the general company at this, and Mary continued, "I'll tell you the chief 'memory'

I have of him, and you can judge for yourselves." Then she told them about the "valley of the shadow," and his version of it. She had a "silver tongue" like her sister, at times, had Mary, and was as direct in her speech as in the old days, when talking to Abner. Before the recital was ended, varied expressions flitted across the faces of the calumniators, and there was not a dry eye in the room! The rancorous tongues were silenced, as she meant them to be, and after that, Mary heard no more aspersions on the character of the man who was responsible for the thought that had been a life-long comfort to her.

This same preacher was very apt at illustration, and one time, when speaking of the "perfect love which casteth out fear,"

he told us how he had made the children at another school understand the idea. He put a little fellow on a ledge at a fairly great height, and telling him that he would certainly not let him fall, asked him to jump into his outstretched arms. But the little chap was afraid, and no amount of coaxing would induce him to leave his safe stand on the ledge. At length, he was lifted down, and the preacher's own little girl was put in his place. Scarcely had the words asking her to jump left his lips, before the tiny figure was flying through the air, then nestling safely in her father's arms. One loved him, so trusted him, and had no fear ; the other did not love, so did not trust, and was afraid. " Perfect love casteth out fear," and if we loved God in the same way, and as strongly, as his little girl loved

him, so surely we should trust in Him, and never be afraid of Him, whatever might betide, so he told us. And children as we were, the lesson sank deep in our minds.

Another preacher was noted for his homely speech, and quaint, familiar methods of illustration. He had been preaching on the parable of the Prodigal Son, and had enlarged on the sufferings and penitence of the "ne'er-do-weel" in a foreign country, with some homely references to "pig-swill." He got the prodigal safely home, and pictured the anxious father seeing him afar off, and rushing to meet and greet him. "Neaw," says he, "he didn't say, 'Fotch thoose owd clooas, an' let him put 'em on; an' bring thoose owd slippers, too, they're good enoo for him!' Nowt o' t' sort; but he said, 'Bring forth the best robe, and

put it on him ; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.' ”

Afterwards he spoke about his sympathy with the elder son, saying how natural and human his feelings were under the circumstances, giving such a vivid word-picture of it all, that we children appreciated and understood the parable better than ever before.

One good old man, talking about the carelessness displayed by many members in their attendance at class-meetings, said, “ At my last class-meeting, there was only another chap present beside mysel', but there were five on us theere, and we had a glorious meeting.” The puzzled expression on the faces of his hearers seemed to give him great delight. Then he added, “ There were God the Father, God the Son, and



God the Holy Ghost, an' us two! That made five, didn't it?"

A tall, thin, delicate-looking old man with pale, worn face, showing traces of much physical suffering, and snow-white hair, whose expression was always genial and kindly, was to Mary a special friend. He had gone through many vicissitudes in the course of his life, and had to fight against ill-health most of the time, but like Abner, he had plenty of "John Bull" in him; and his last days were peaceful and comfortable, and quite free from financial worry. In spite of ill-health, he was invariably bright and cheery, and supplied Mary with food for thought in every conversation she had with him.

On leaving her one day, after a visit to her home, he said, "Now, Mary, we all

have our crosses—some light, some heavy.

Mine has been pretty heavy nearly all my life ; but after all the burden-bearing, I say to you, as I would say to everybody, ‘ Carry your cross, don’t drag it.’ ”

## PART IV

“MARY JOHNSON’S MEMORIES”

*(In letters to her sister Elinor.)*



## CHAPTER X

### LETTER I

Lanchester,

2nd January, 19—.

MY DEAREST,

Of late I have been in a reminiscent mood, and must perforce let my dearest and best of sisters have some inkling of my cogitations.

Christmastide, with all its associations, its expressions of peace and goodwill, its feasts, and family reunions, has brought back a flood of memories, and carried me back against the stream of time in retrospect.

At first, there seemed a jumble—the old

village, with the old familiar faces, "ma-mee" (the old pet name slips out! Do you remember the little village lassie running to one of her companions with, "Eh, Mary Johnson caws her mother 'mammy' yet," on hearing me use it one day?), and dad, and the whole family of us; and all the old, happy times when we were children, care-free, with the deep, unquestioning faith of childhood—all seemed to come together in one confused mass!

Little by little, the tangle straightens out; one memory after another seems to stand out by itself, and I am like a spectator watching the scenes in the cinematograph as they pass quickly before my eyes, one succeeding another without any regard to due sequence.

Here is a child running out in the frost,

revelling in, and appreciating the beauty and purity of the snow ; hurrying off to the pond to find a slide. On the way, there is a tiny sheet of ice, under which she sees, scintillating, and looking wondrously lovely in the sunlight, a ring, just the size to fit her finger, if once she can get hold of it. The little feet set to work, and smash in the coating of ice, but alas ! and alas ! where is the ring then ? One of life's disillusions, and the blow is severe ! But she is a philosopher without knowing it, and making up her mind that there must never have been a ring there, only in the ice, she consoles herself with sliding on the pond, where soon other children join her, and the fun waxes fast and furious ; but the ring episode is never forgotten.

Again there is a picture. There has

been much talk about the school "breaking up" for the holidays, and the childish mind grasps eagerly at the idea of no school to go to, no irksome lessons to learn. She sallies forth as early as possible the next morning, to feast her eyes on the school "broken up," and in ruins, only to find it still there, and intact! She returns home slowly and wonderingly, in great disappointment, but diplomatic enough to keep her disappointment to herself. Disillusion again! Poor lassie!

As she gets older, others occur at irregular intervals, and she finds out many things are not what they seem; that truth and sincerity are jewels kept by some folks for only special, very special occasions; that many idols she has set up on imposing pedestals have only feet of clay,



and at the slightest shake, collapse, and lie in scattered fragments on the ground.

These disillusionments hurt, the wounds varying, of course, but at length she learns not to expect too much, and to wait with an open mind for what appears, striving hard to keep her own standard high, and to act accordingly. "It is not how others treat me, but my own course of conduct, for which I must answer to God," she summarises.

Childhood's days pass ; lessons are no longer irksome, but a real pleasure ; and life becomes serious, as the fact that each one has a battle to fight alone, becomes more and more evident ; and yet, one must strive to do what one can to brighten others, and to lighten the burdens of the weaker ones, in emulating the "Great Pattern."

Now I see old Betty, as she was years ago, with her pleasant, homely face, and round, fat figure, always nice to Mary, no matter how sharp-tongued to others. She seems to be waiting for me to read for her, the greatest treat she had, she used to tell me. She passes, and is carried to her long home.

Her place is taken by the other Betty—"Betty o' th' fowt," as the villagers called her, now tied to the house—who wanted me to come and read, and talk to her, and give her all the news of the old chapel, which she had attended all her life. Many a lesson did old "Betty o' th' fowt" teach me in those days, and showed me an example of patience in tribulation, and trust in the Great All-Father.

What a bonnie laddie is this! But

wait, the face is not quite clear. Why, it is Frank ! his face brimming over with fun, as he seems to sing that bit of a silly old song he was so fond of :—

“ I’m mixed ! I’m bothered !

I’m not fit to be left out alone !

Nobody knows me. Where do I live ?

Will somebody take me home ? ”

then bows sedately, and retires.

He slips back again in a moment, his eyes twinkling as he looks straight at me, and trolls out another ditty :—

“ Jeremiah, blow the fire, puff, puff, puff !

First you do it gently, then comes it rather rough !

Jeremiah, blow the fire, puff, puff, puff ! ”

Instantaneously comes another mind-picture, and I see a barefooted child, in long, white nightgown, stealthily slipping downstairs in the early morning. She

knows Frank will be busy lighting the fire for mother before going out. As the little figure reaches the bottom of the stairway, she peeps round the old grandfather clock, and whispers, "Frank!" Frank turns, and nods, and smiles at the little lass, who makes a rush, drops on the rug, and clasps his knees delightedly. "Sing me the song, Frankie, please," lisps the child. Frank gets the bellows, and blows away, singing as lustily as he dare, "Jeremiah, blow the fire, puff, puff, puff!" while the tiny head nods, and the wee hands beat time on his knee as long as the song continues. Dear, dear Frank! and, oh, for the happy days of childhood, that pass away all too quickly!

Edna and I are trotting off to town after school one evening. We have got away

from the village, and are passing through a more thickly populated district, where houses line the road on each side. A bonnie, young woman stands in her doorway—a type of sweet, clean, healthy, Lancashire motherhood—with her baby crowing in her arms, as sweet, and clean, and bonnie as herself. We are walking briskly along, but at the doorway, although I do not know her personally, I stop with, “Please, oh, please, let me kiss your baby!” and the smiling mother appears only too pleased to comply with my request, while the baby crows more delightfully than ever. I hurry after Edna, who looks amused, and says, “That is just like you, you impulsive creature.”

Same scene some time later. You have been home on one of your rare visits. I

am accompanying you to the railway station, and first one figure, then another appears at the doorways as we pass, the bonnie, little mother among them. They nod and smile at the "Johnson girls," and you turn to me, and say, "Now, isn't it worth coming home for, if only to see those kindly nods and smiles, and the pleasant Lancashire faces?"

The fine figure of Abner comes on the scene, and I hear his genial greeting, "Well, Mary, an' heaw are yo' this mornin'?" Jerry trots past with his basket, raising his hand in greeting to both as he goes; while Levi, with his bright, beaming face, drives quickly by. He is always in a hurry, but always merry.

Who is that woman sitting reading at a table, holding a candle in her hand? The

candle-light is poor, and she looks up eagerly. It is Isabel, and she smiles, and says, "Eh, Mary, is that yo'? Ah've brokken my lamp-glass agen. Ah am fain to see yo'!"

Now comes dear Mr. Standish, with his delicate face. Dearest, don't you hear what he says? "Carry your cross, Mary, —don't drag it!" and the kindly face disappears.

Here, I am walking along the "broad, main road, open to the winds of Heaven," and I am decorated with a badge, that has been hard fought for, and dearly won, at the expense of much midnight oil and mental toil. Old Robert Aston is at the cross-roads. He sees me, and makes a rush. "Eh, Mary, Ah am proud this day. Gie us a shake o' your hond. Ah'm

prouder than Ah con say," and as I turn away, another one rushes up. It is our friend Tom Carter.

"Where are you going, Mary?"

"I am going to see Abner. He wants to see me decorated."

"Well, I am coming on the way with you."

His way lies in a totally different direction, but no matter.

As we set off, Mary Jane Gore runs up, with, "Oh, Mary, Ah've never seen yo' afore to tell yo' how pleased I am," and she gives me a resounding kiss; then Tom and I move off towards Abner's house.

Now it is Abner's turn. He is on his sick-bed, from which he is destined never to rise, and he tries to raise himself as I enter. "Neaw, Mary, didn' Ah tell yo'



Ah'd back yo' agen 'em aw?" and he looks quite happy and content as he grasps my hand.

Again the scene changes, and I am once more on the highway between the village and the town, on my way to home and mother, and happy in the knowledge. A figure comes towards me, but I can hardly recognise the pale, stricken face with the sorrowful eyes. Can this be the tomboy Elsie—ringleader of all fun and mischief in the happy, childhood's days—hobbledehoy Elsie—Elsie the irrepressible? But Elsie it is! As we draw nearer to each other through the gloaming, it is borne on my mind that Elsie's mother has been ailing for long. They had left the village years ago, but towards the last, the old lady begged to be brought back to die in

the old place which she loved so well, pleading so hard that they let her have her way, and Elsie came to nurse her. Poor lassie! I read the trouble in her eyes aright. Her mother must be gone. Although we have not met for a long, long time, as soon as we come together my hand goes out, and clasps hers, and I say, "Oh, Elsie!" She understands all I would say, and kisses me, but cannot articulate a syllable. We go on, each on our own way.

When I get to mother, I put my arms round her, and hold her close, close, as if I would never let her go. She is surprised, but when I say I have met Elsie, she understands. Rarely are words needed between the dear mother and me—we can read each other's thoughts so clearly!

Some time later, we are standing at the grave of her youngest brother, the last of a fine, old stock. As the first sods are thrown down, it comes to me with a shock, "Mother last, now dear uncle's gone. It will be her turn next!" and with the thought, involuntarily I grip her tightly, and draw her to me. Ah, me! no matter how closely I hold her, the call will come some time, and I shall have to loosen my hold, and let her go.

I came across some beautiful verses the other day, dear, written by Mrs. Ellen H. Gates, every word of which finds its echo in my heart. As I read them, I sat again on my little footstool at mother's knee, caressing her dear hands, just as I had always liked to do from being a tiny child. How precious that "children's hour" (as

Longfellow so aptly terms it), always seemed to me! but it is far more precious now—one of my sweetest memories, indeed. Shall I throw the lines on the screen for you?

#### BEAUTIFUL HANDS

Such beautiful, beautiful hands!  
They are neither white nor small,  
And you, I know, would scarcely think  
That they were white at all.  
I've looked on hands of form and hue—  
A sculptor's dream might be,  
Yet are these aged, wrinkled hands  
Most beautiful to me.

Such beautiful, beautiful hands!  
When her heart was weary and sad,  
These patient hands kept toiling on  
That the children might be glad.  
I often weep when looking back  
To childhood's distant day;  
I think how these hands rested not  
When mine were at their play.

Such beautiful, beautiful hands !  
They are growing feeble now,  
And time and toil have left their mark  
On hand, and heart, and brow.  
Alas ! alas ! the nearing time—  
The sad, sad day to me,  
When 'neath the daisies, out of sight  
These hands must folded be.

But, oh, beyond these shadowy lands,  
Where all is bright and fair,  
I know full well these dear old hands  
Will palms of victory bear ;  
Where crystal streams, through endless years,  
Flow over golden sands,  
And where the old grow young again  
I'll clasp my mother's hands !

There's a leap now, dear, and I am  
“passing through the waters,” everything  
I hold dear in life seeming to slip from  
me. A few days (or was it not a hundred  
years ?), and mother has passed to the

other side, leaving me desolate indeed. The one who should have been a "pillar of strength" has failed me utterly; my oldest and most trusted friend is at this very time setting out on the wide, wide sea, and a bitter, bitter cry goes up, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" I am benumbed, rendered weak as a child, and almost powerless, by the stress and storm, when a kindly hand is stretched out, and a good man brings me comfort. A doctor and a gentleman, and moreover a Christian is he, and his words come to me now:—"You do not grieve as one without hope; you have in reality 'laid up treasure in Heaven,' so take courage and hope for the future, for of a surety 'God is love' for ever and ever!"

Edna Lyall says somewhere, "God

never shuts one gate behind us, till He has opened another in front ;” and strange to say, this has been my latest contribution to an album of quotations. An old friend comes across the book soon after this, and says, “ Why, Mary, you might have known !” Certainly the gates open for me, and I see God’s finger on the latch of each one, till I come out of the tempest—buffetted indeed, and weak, with many “ silver threads ”—peaceful and calm, and trustful for the future. “ What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter ;” “ Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid,” come to me with a deeper, sweeter, fuller meaning than ever before.

A lassie I knew in an old Lancashire village, a factory lass, but a "King's daughter" for all that, was stricken suddenly by disease, and after a few days it became evident that the end was drawing near. As she lay dying, a sudden light spread over her face, her eyes glowed, and she smiled beatifically as she looked upwards, and said to a friend at the bedside, "I can see something you can't see, and I am so happy!" It seemed as if she had been vouchsafed a glimpse into heaven before entering. Verily, we need not grieve as those without hope!



## CHAPTER XI

### LETTER I (*continued*)

WHOSE is this sweet face, with eyes looking so tenderly down on me from under the neatly-braided hair? It is mother's, and behind her I see dad looking at me with all his old kindness; while further back, the grand, old face and snow-white hair of gran'dad show. Mother smiles, and a whisper floats through the air, faint, yet clear, "My dear little All-aloney! Trust God to the last, hard as the way may seem, and stony the road. Trust God, and remember your watchwords," and the picture fades. I

break down utterly, and become as a child again. Ah, me! how lonely the time has been since she crossed the River!

A letter appears on the screen, another and another, till in big, bold characters stands out the word, "Excelsior."

Then comes a picture—the picture we puzzled over as children, many a time and oft, and of which we were so fond. A man is pushing his way up a steep and stony hillside. He has a staff in his hand, from the top of which floats out on the air "a banner with the strange device, Excelsior," and as one gazes, one can almost hear the word borne along on the wings of the wind:—"Excelsior," "Excelsior"—"Higher, yet Higher"—in life, and motive, and purity, and thought, and action! Higher, still higher, our

banner always waving in the breeze, till we have surmounted all obstacles, and can pass from Nature to the “Everlasting Arms” of Nature’s God, and rest contentedly there. Excelsior!

The scene changes, and again a letter appears, followed by others, till “Ebenezer” in letters of gold stands out vividly. My watchword of later years, which I used in conjunction with the other!

Now comes a rapid phastasmagoria, one scene following another in quick succession—crosses, and trials, and rebuffs, interspersed with pleasant reminders, happy days, and deeds of kindness wrought and received, which are ineffaceable; and again, after it all, “Ebenezer,” “Ebenezer,” and the word rings out, clear

as a clarion call, "Ebenezer"—"Hitherto hath the Lord helped us!" And as the picture is withdrawn, I hear again the whisper, faint, yet clear, "My dear little All-aloney! Trust God. Remember your watchwords."

Some photographs come now. A man, grave and stern-looking, appears. I recognise him as Elsie's "Owd Tom." A Puritan, austere, and most bigoted he would have been, had he lived in olden times; but the resentment still remaining from childish days is swallowed up in great pity for his narrow and mistaken views of life, and stern sense of duty carried out to the letter. Surely of all people in the world, Christians should bear the brightest faces, inasmuch as their hopes are set high. Let him pass.

What a contrast! A tall, slender, athletic figure is in his place. His expression is pleasing, his whole figure and bearing animated. He looks out on the world with a smile. No half-measures here, but everything thorough and straight, and "true to the line"! To him I owe my "soul's awakening," the wider opening of my eyes to the beauty around me in sea, and sky, and vegetation, and all the works of God from the lowest to the highest stages. As if in response to some thought, the picture moves slowly, very slowly, off.

Another presents itself, a figure burlier in every way. The face is quieter, more reposeful, the whole bearing more sedate; but the expression is gentle and kindly, and I hear, as in a dream, "Take it all as discipline, Mary, and all will come right in

time ; ” and my mind flies back to impatient, girlish rebellion at things going wrong, after my best efforts to keep them right, when the gentle words came like balm. This, also, passes slowly.

It is followed by another athletic figure. The eyes twinkle occasionally, but there is an expression of bitterness flitting across the face at times. I smile, and memory carries me straight off to the moors on the borderland of two northern counties. He and I are walking over the heights on a lovely summer evening. The air is delicious, and a Sabbath-like peace pervades the scene, so wild, yet beautiful. I turn to him and say, “ Now, isn’t it a pleasure to be alive, and in such a scene as this ? ” and get, “ Ah, lassie, keep that spirit as long as ever you can. Pray God you’ll never be

so bitter a cynic as I.” Since then, alas ! I’ve had my share of bitterness, “full measure, pressed down, and running over,” and yet through it all I can say, “I know that my Redeemer liveth !” What it is to be young, and enthusiastic, with perfect faith in, and hope for, the future !

Another animated figure, with pale face, and dark hair, the eyes dark and restless, but pleasant-looking always, reminding me of many happy hours of collaboration, is followed by a big, burly, harsh-looking man, of whom the blunt, outspoken village folks used to say, “Nobery dar speyk a word to him, except that little Miss Johnson !” An autocrat of autocrats was he, giving out commands in stentorian tones to grown-up folks he had taught as children, whose children he has now in

charge ; and yet, " My children shall not be ordered about by anybody," he roars. Inconsistency, thy name is man ! He whisks off, and I have no desire to have him linger.

All these, more or less, have had some influence on my life, at some period or other, for good or ill. They are " my schools and schoolmasters," in part, passing in review.

Here I will draw the curtain, lest I give you a surfeit of my dreams.

My love reaches out to you always, my dearest, wherever I am, wherever you may be.

Your affectionate sister,

MARY.



## CHAPTER XII

### LETTER II

Lanchester,

13th January, 19—.

MY DEAREST,

So you are like Oliver Twist, and clamouring for more, are you? Well, my stage scenery is portable, my drop curtain light—I am ready, aye ready, and willing moreover, inasmuch as it gives you pleasure.

Now, dear, I'm going to whirl you away to Yorkshire. It's a bonnie, country lane, lying off the "King's highway," and we see a row of neat cottages, one possessing a rustic porch round the doorway, which is covered just now with *canariensis* in full

bloom. I open the door, and find myself in a homely, comfortable room, spotlessly clean, with table daintily set for my tea. A man's smiling face appears at the inner doorway, and a pleasant voice greets me with, "Well, my bit o' sunshine, I'm glad to see you home." It's only a temporary "home from home," but how pleased ma-mee was when I told her what they called me here. "So they've found my 'home sunbeam,' have they? Tell them it does me good just to see your face when I have you home for holidays."

To the cottage home one day comes a letter with a deep, black border. It is from the heart-broken parents of a little scholar I had, one of the sweetest and gentlest little creatures I ever taught. Lizzie's illness and death have been very sudden,

and much of the time when conscious, she was talking of Miss Johnson, who had been away from the village some time, long enough for the child to have quite forgotten her, and yet her mother said she had left a deeper impression on the child's mind than any other person she had ever known. One never knows how, or when, or where, seeds are being sown in other lives ; and because of their little, dead girl, there will be a bond between these friends and myself till death enables us to see not "as through a glass darkly," but clearly, and "face to face."

"A change comes o'er the spirit of my dream," and I am again in the village where little Lizzie lived—have come for a last goodbye. The district is famous for its sweet voices, and the music sometimes

would melt a heart of stone ! Lizzie's home one evening has been ringing with the strains of, "Count your blessings," and many of the old, old songs, and they finish up with, "God be with you till we meet again." The next day, the dear old friend with whom I had lived, Lizzie's mother, and a few others, are on the station platform to see me away, when an old gentleman comes up in a great hurry. He is the oldest member at the chapel, and quite a patriarch. He jumps into the carriage, stretches out his hands in benediction over my head, and says, "Fare thee well, dear, fare thee well, and if it be for ever, fare thee well !" He has only just time to leap from the carriage, and the train is off. I call, "Tell him what you were singing for me last night," and see dimly, as through a

mist, a mixture of smiles and tears on the faces of my friends, as I am borne quickly out of sight. Shall I ever see them again? God knows.

A lady in the carriage seems interested in the little play. She asks, "Are you going far?" and I answer, rather absently, "Not very." "I beg your pardon, but from what your friend said, I gathered you were going abroad." "Oh, yes. I am bound for the Antipodes in a short time." She leaves us at Nelson, and when she rises, she bends forward and kisses me heartily, saying, "The Lord bless, and keep thee!" The tears come, though I smile, and say, "Thank you!" The incident is so truly, typically "Lancashire," and the good wish so spontaneous and sincere, though coming from a stranger, that I carry

it with me as a pleasant memory always.

Dearest, you and I and Jeanie are on a railway station platform. The train comes up, you give me a last kiss, and jump into a carriage, waving your hand as the train moves off. I stand there, tense, looking after the receding train, and turn to Jeanie with, "Now, dear, the chief bitterness is past," and she nods comprehensively, her eyes speak volumes, but she says never a word! A few days later, and I am out on the wide ocean, far away from all my loved ones, a veritable "little All-aloney"—the "lengthening chain," which binds me to "England, home, and beauty," becoming stronger and stronger with "each remove," as the good ship bravely makes

her way through the waters over countless miles !

Here, we are at Port Melbourne, after many new experiences. It is Sunday, and we go to a chapel where the anniversary sermons are being preached. The children are on a platform, dressed in white, and a Birkenhead lady, friend and fellow-passenger, turns to me with brimming eyes, and says, " Doesn't it remind you of home, and the children 'sitting up in white' in the dear, old chapels in Lancashire ? "

Here comes the face of a funny, little, old lady, active and wide-awake, with whimsical expression. Who is this ? Not any one you know, dear, but I'll introduce you.

We stay in Melbourne quite a week, discharging, and taking in cargo. It is a

good opportunity to see the city, so a Yorkshire lassie and I wander off most days, and explore to our hearts' content. One evening at tea-time, this old lady is bemoaning her loneliness, and wishing she could get out and explore too. I promptly offer to take her out the very next afternoon, and she is delighted. We set off, and I show her the lions of the place, which I know pretty well by this time. We drift at length to the big Exhibition building, now used as a pleasure resort. There are few visitors, so we two wander around, and contrive to get lost in the maze. Oh, what fun I had for about half-an-hour! I climbed up fences, and did all I could to find some way out, but effort after effort proved unavailing, and the old lady said at last, "I'm sure we've



been in here hours and hours, and we shall never get out. The boat will go and leave us behind." I laughed, and laughed, till eventually she joined in quite merrily. We got out at last, I don't know how to this day, went inside, and sat down to see the "living pictures." I had one beside me, as the sight of the old lady's enjoyment gave me as much pleasure as the pictures on the screen.

As we went along the principal street, we got some dainties for our supper. (When in port, it is a treat to get something to eat that has not the "ship flavour," as I called it, permeating it.) Suddenly, the old lady darted from my side with, "I'll catch you in a minute, Miss Johnson." I smiled, and slyly watched to see where she would go. She

came back, hugging something under her cloak, and to tease her I said, "Now, what have you been buying this time?"

"Oh, it's a bottle of beer. It's a shilling a bottle on the ship, and not half so good as this will be."

"Well, you know I'm teetotal," I said, "and not supposed to sit down with anyone drinking beer. Suppose I shall have to stretch a point for once."

The excitement of the afternoon and evening had told on the old lady, and at supper she became quite garrulous, so much so, that a gentleman came up, and said, "Now what have you been doing to Mrs. Sloane, Miss Johnson?" and his eyes fairly twinkled as he spoke. She began with a long account of our adventures, but I coaxed her off to bed. An

hour or two afterwards, I went down to the cabin to see how she fared, and she sat up in her bunk, and began to rattle off as hard as ever, just like a child who has had some special treat, so I flew off.

Some years later, while in a tramcar in Sydney, we slowed down for some reason, and passed a sprightly old lady walking along the pavement. I recognized my old lady of the Melbourne Maze, and would have given something to have been able to skip out, and have a chat with her, but that was not to be.

Sydney next, and the boat is moored to the wharf. Somehow, the old folks on the ship, as everywhere, have spotted Mary, and often, as I gave one here and there an arm for a stroll on the deck, I would find many nodding and smiling at the sight.

The old ladies come up with the rest of my ship friends for a last good-bye. Then I find a little group of men round me, with whom I have hitherto exchanged only civil greetings. They say, "Give us a shake of your hand, Miss Johnson, and God bless you wherever you go!" I am surprised, and touched, and say, "Thank you, thank you. That has done me good," as I grant their request; and they raise their hats, as they move off. "Ships that pass in the night!"

Another jump, over a thousand miles and more, and we are putting in at another wharf, from which faces in thousands look up at us, as we steam slowly in. Among all those thousands, I am looking for one, and soon a cry rings out, "Frank, oh, Frank!" and the face disappears as I call.

The gangway is not properly down, and I am looking in vain for another glimpse of the face, when I am caught from behind in a pair of strong, loving arms, and the tempests, and tossings, and upheavals are all forgotten—swallowed up in the perfect joy of reunion after many years! There is a baptism of tears in a short time, when I find myself in a cosy room, and turning suddenly, find mother's sweet face smiling down on me from the wall; and Frank, strong man though he is, breaks down too!

Are you getting weary of my visions, dear? One or two more, and I may write "Finis."

## CHAPTER XIII

### LETTER II (*continued*)

It is a lovely evening, and the Southern Cross is gleaming brightly overhead, some few months later. We are out for a walk along a wide street, when we come across a mission band. The musicians suddenly strike up one of the old "Methody" tunes we had sung on many an anniversary day in the old village chapel, and without warning, the tears flow. I move away quickly and impulsively. Frank misses me immediately. He follows, looks at me wonderingly, and after a moment or two, understands.

'The nostalgia is horrible sometimes, and one never knows what will awaken it—a snatch of a tune, a stray word, or a bit of the Lancashire dialect, and the flood-gates of memory open! I have been in stores, and on stating my requirements, have seen things flung down on the counter, the hands thrown up, and heard in eager, sometimes tearful tones, "What part of Lancashire did you come from? and how long have you been away?" On a ship once, I passed two men in a corridor, with a few words of apology as I hurried past. I heard a clatter of footsteps behind me, and just as I had one foot on the stairway I wished to ascend, my shoulder was gripped gently from behind, and I heard, "Oh, I say, that sounds like Lancashire. Is it?"

“Yes,” I said, “Lancashire every bit, and all the time!”

Only those who are, or have been, “exiles from home,” can fully realise and appreciate the inner meaning, and truth, and beauty of Robert Browning’s “Home thoughts, from abroad” :—

“Oh, to be in England

Now that April’s there,

And whoever wakes in England

Sees, some morning, unaware,

That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf

Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,

While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough

In England now !

And after April, when May follows,

And the whitethroat builds, and all the swallows !

Hark, where my blossomed pear-tree in the hedge

Leans to the field, and scatters on the clover

Blossoms and dewdrops—at the bent spray’s

edge—



That's the wise thrush ; he sings each song twice  
over,

Lest you should think he never could recapture  
The first fine careless rapture !

And though the fields look rough with hoary dew,  
All will be gay when noontide wakes anew

The buttercups, the little children's dower

—Far brighter than this gaudy melon-flower !”

Another picture comes. I am at an isolated colonial station, far from neighbours, and a long way back from the main road. I have unexpectedly been left alone, and with one exception, am the only human being on the place. Suddenly I find myself in the grip of strong arms ; but, at first, am not in the least afraid, thinking it is only a mischievous prank, as they belong to one to whom I have done many a kindness, rendered many a womanly service. As I catch sight of

the face, however, I see something that terrifies me, yet I cannot explain why, and a great revulsion of feeling comes over me. What is my strength in comparison with his? I struggle to free myself, but the grip becomes more and more frenzied, till I cry out aloud to God for help. Immediately, by an almost superhuman effort—I never know how—I set myself free, and dart out on winged feet, into the darkness of the night.

When I come to myself, I am stretched out on the grass among some bushes. The fresh, pure air revives me; I take courage, and move slowly towards the house. Some one coming out to seek me, meets me, but with what a different face—the brute all gone, and only the nobility of penitent man

to be seen. "Oh, forgive me, forgive me, Miss Johnson. I must have been mad."

When in the house, I turn to him. "Down on your knees, man, and ask God to forgive you. You have insulted the 'daughter of a King'!" And down he drops, while such a heart-breaking prayer as I have never heard before, ascends to Heaven. I am kneeling by his side, and feel the stalwart figure shaken convulsively by sobs. After a time, quietness reigns, and I hear in trembling tones, "I've never wept, nor prayed before, since my mother was taken from me when I was twelve years old. May God strike me dead if ever I lay such brutal hands on you again." There's a gentle hand-shake, a quiet 'Good-night,' and I find myself alone. As I

retire, a still, small voice makes itself heard, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

I am going to transport you now, my dear one, over thousands of miles. We are off the West Australian coast, and the ship is tossing, and rolling heavily. Everything else is rolling too, and the breakfast things roll off the table, as fast as the stewards put them on. Eventually, the task is given up as hopeless, and we regale ourselves with biscuits, or nibble at something in our own cabins. It is bitterly cold, and discomfort reigns supreme, as the storm has lasted right through the night. We reel and stagger as we move about, as if we, one and all, had been imbibing "not wisely, but too well." The coast is veiled in mist, and rain is steadily falling. We

seem to stand out for hours before putting in for our final call.

We get to the wharf at last, and immediately I spot two friendly faces on the lookout for me. I get down as quickly as I can, and am whirled away by train to a lovely home some miles out. It is a veritable miniature palace, one of the most tasteful and dainty homes it has been my lot to see—the very prettiest I have seen out of England. (There is nothing the wide world over to beat the “stately homes of England,” or the cottage homes either, for that matter.) The drawing-room is in white and gold, and I see one or two “bits” for which my own brush is responsible. While at dinner, the telephone bell rings, and a voice comes, “Is Miss Johnson there? Tell her I’m coming to the boat

as soon as ever I can." We have only a few hours, as we sail at midnight, so after a time we make our way back to the wharf. In a little while, there is a rush, and my hand is gripped eagerly, as I hear, "Oh, Miss Johnson, you carry me back to home and boyhood. What a treat to see your face again," while I just manage to say, "Fred, dear boy!" It is a Lancashire lad, one of my old school-boys (always boys to me, though many could crush me in their hands now!), and for a time there is no chance for any of the others to get in a word. They understand, so smile, and take it all in good part. Time flies, and trains and tide wait for no man, so long farewells are said, they move off to the railway station, while I make my way to the boat, and soon the "beat, beat" of the

engines tells me we are off. "Good-bye to Australia!"

A ship is drawing near a coast. Hundreds of pairs of eyes are looking out eagerly. We get nearer, and nearer, and the bonnie shores of England, the equal of which we have never seen in all those thousands and thousands of miles we have covered, come to view.

We have traversed the Pacific and Indian Oceans; have put in at Colombo (for coal—and got it, everywhere!) "where every prospect pleases, and only man is vile" (They tried to cheat us at all our calling-places, by the way!); have passed along the Red Sea; seen the lovely panorama, and beautiful colouring round about Suez (where my fellow-passengers assured me "distance lent enchantment,"

as is the case in most Eastern places); have crept at snail's pace along that masterpiece of engineering, the Suez Canal, with its dreary, desert surroundings, and its night mists; had adventures at Port Said; got out into the Mediterranean, and had a glimpse of its lighthouse, Stromboli; seen, and visited (and loathed!) Naples, and admired the beautiful Bay; (Remembered and appreciated "See Naples and die," and speaking of our experiences ashore, I said, "I can quite understand that one would be more willing to die, after seeing Naples, than before," but a lady told me that there was a village or suburb called "Die," which puts a different construction on the matter altogether) revelled in the splendour, and beauty, and cleanly appearance of



Marseilles, and the wild grandeur of the Chateau d'If of Monte Cristo fame ; walked about the streets and gardens of Gibraltar, and looked for, but did not see, the monkeys ; and have come unscathed through the Bay of Biscay, when these bonnie, bonnie shores appear.

I say something about this scene surpassing any we have yet come across, and somebody (an Australian, I think,) says rather sneeringly, "Just listen to Miss Johnson. It's only because it's England." I smile, and retort, "No, it's because I think it is the truth. I would say it of that lovely view stretching before us, were it Australia, but it is not. It is England, England ! "This precious stone set in the silver sea !"—"This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England !"—"This

land of such dear souls, this dear, dear land!" There are smiles and nods of appreciation from all the English folks who have heard the little warfare of words, and I think I come out "more than conqueror."

There are crowds on the wharf, and I am looking for your face, dear, among them all. I fling out a long scarf, one of your own gifts to me, and see one of mine flung out as an answering signal.

Your motto, dearest, is the best you could have chosen:— *Semper fidelis*—"Always faithful;" and the sight of your face brings me "sweet content," after much turmoil. And for the rest, am I not in God's good hands? Is this life as some would have us believe, "a striving, and a striving, and an ending in nothing?"

Not for a moment would I believe that. What a mockery it would make of life, of God, of goodness, and of all we hold dear!

Now, I am going to finish off with one of my ideals. Wherever my future lot may be cast, whether under the Southern Cross, or the Great Bear, may I try to remember my old watchwords, and keep before my eyes and mind, "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report"!

As I write, that little incident in the trial of Joan of Arc flashes through my mind. One of her judges asked her, "Knowest thou, Joan, that thou art in a state of grace?" and she answered, "Sire,

if I am, God keep me there ; if I am not, God guide me there " ! The stern judge himself was struck with the force and beauty of her answer, and could not repress the exclamation, " Joan, thou hast answered well ! " How beautiful and pathetic it all is, when one thinks of the sad circumstances under which the words have been spoken ; and what a shameful blot on our history did these circumstances cause ! Could I make a better ending than by making Joan's prayer my own ? " If I am in a state of grace, God keep me there ; if I am not, God guide me there ! "

Best of love to you ever, my dearest,  
from

Your affectionate sister,

MARY.













